

1991-3

Freedom, Democracy, Equality: a Draft Programme for Democratic Socialism

Workers' Party of Ireland

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/workerpmat>

 Part of the [Political History Commons](#), and the [Political Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Workers' Party of Ireland, "Freedom, Democracy, Equality: a Draft Programme for Democratic Socialism" (1991). *Materials*. 9.
<https://arrow.tudublin.ie/workerpmat/9>

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by the Workers' Party of Ireland at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Materials by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact yvonne.desmond@tudublin.ie, arrow.admin@tudublin.ie, brian.widdis@tudublin.ie.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License](#)

Freedom Democracy Equality

**A draft programme
for democratic socialism**

**The Workers' Party
March 1991**

CONTENTS

SECTION	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
A STRATEGY FOR THE '90'S	3
FUNDAMENTAL VALUES	7
DEMOCRACY, CITIZENSHIP AND THE STATE	11
PRINCIPLES OF A SOCIALIST ECONOMIC POLICY	15
CLASS AND INEQUALITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND	19
CLASS, SECTARIANISM AND INEQUALITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND	25
GLOBAL POLITICS	29
CONSTITUTION	35


INTRODUCTION

The Workers' Party is a democratic, socialist party - and more. For we cannot stand still. The Workers' Party must also be a feminist party. A green party. A party of the unemployed and low-paid. A champion of personal freedom. A friend and ally of the Third World. An integral part of the European left.

The Workers' Party is a party of change. In the face of a profoundly conservative political culture, we put socialism on the agenda. We overturned the cosy two and a half party system, and brought class politics to Dail Eireann. Against the black flags of sectarianism and terrorism in Northern Ireland we raised the bright shining banners of peace and democracy. And we broke the conservative grip in Ireland on European politics, by bringing the voice of the Irish working class to the European Parliament.

We face many new challenges. And we will meet them, not by blind faith or dogma, but by analysis, reflection, a considered response to changing times, and a strong commitment to better times.

The Workers' Party welcomes the challenges ahead. We are confident that the idea of socialism coupled with the practice of democracy provides the basis for the radical transformation of Irish society. We look to an egalitarian, tolerant, and pluralist society within which everyone is afforded the means and the opportunities to participate as an equal citizen. A society in which the free development of each is a condition the free development of all.

 This document sets out the broad political principles which would underpin such a society.

Sean Garland,
General Secretary.

A STRATEGY FOR THE '90s

- 1.1 This Party Programme is being produced at a time of massive political transformation of the world order. Yet in spite of the many political realignments, the opening up of dialogue and debate about the future of socialism, the development of the global economy and the great hope for peace and a new world order, we find that exploitation, poverty and war are still endemic in our society.
- 1.2 In Ireland we still have sectarian political alignment, outdated political divisions, gross inequalities, emigration, mass unemployment and widespread exploitation and poverty. Yet none of the other political parties have even attempted to challenge the power of the vested interests who perpetuate inequality and privilege in Irish life. In Northern Ireland the leaders of the traditional constitutional parties continue to refuse to show the qualities of flexibility and compromise necessary to create the conditions for political progress. The priority of maintaining their control of the major sectarian voting blocs has come before that of creating the conditions for isolation and defeat of terrorism by the development of local democracy. In many respects they act to represent those vested interests.
- 1.3 The Workers' Party believes that only a radical, structural transformation of our society can hope to bring about lasting equality and justice or provide for the needs of all our people. We see that transformation as the democratic socialist task.
- 1.4 Our analysis and our political practice is firmly rooted in the reality of our own society. It springs from the actual and changing experience of our people, from our understanding of our economy, our growing social divisions, the limitations of our political system and of our place in the emerging European Community and the wider global economy. It takes account of the historic experience of our own party, the world socialist movement and its successes and failures, the changing nature of modern capitalism and the persistence of privilege and poverty, of wealth and waste, in a society of great scientific achievement.
- 1.5 Within our society there are many emerging forces for social progress and many entrenched elites holding onto power and privilege. We must hold out to the people a radical concept of a more democratic state, a democratised

and dynamic economy, a dominance of social rights over individual greed - an open, democratic society which is built on the rights and responsibilities of free citizens, not powerful elites.

- 1.6 We will have to socialise the market mechanism, using it to serve a wider social interest than has hitherto been the case. Our belief is in co-operation, rather than competition, between people, states and communities. We reject all forms of exploitation and racial, religious or sex discrimination. We are international in outlook but equally proud of our own social progress here in Ireland.
- 1.7 Our political agenda is one of pushing out the frontiers of democracy and leading towards a new socialist society. We must help to empower people to control as much as possible of their own lives. That means responding to their needs at many different levels, in the community, in local government, in national or local organisations, in the Dail or the European Parliament. There is no single organisational form for such responses but there can be a consistent socialist analysis and strategy which links all these struggles.
- 1.8 The following elements will be central to our strategy as we develop our party as the major force for socialist transformation in Irish society.

Party Organisation

- 1.9 The Party must become a vibrant centre of analysis, education, organisation and political strategy. It must never be simply an electoral machine. Party membership must be broadened to include the greatest possible number of those committed to work for the objectives of the party. Membership must be about participation, with others, in developing ourselves as human beings, in addressing our own concerns and those of others. People's politics are determined by their own experience and their political battles are generally fought at a place and a level that they can cope with and understand. Very often, it is single-issue campaigns which lead them to a more global understanding of society as a whole.

Democracy

- 1.10 The democratic ideal is the driving force for political transformation and must be pursued in politics, in the economy and in social life. Our own practice of democracy must be characterised by the highest level of participation. We have something to share with others, but we must also learn from the people

and never stop listening to their responses to their own exploitation or oppression.

Practical Politics

- 1.11 Our vision of society must extend from current realities to a set of realistic objectives which focusses our direction and determines our pace of struggle. Our practice must address the immediate needs of people but also lead on to the wider political agenda. We are about change but recognise that that must grow from the immediate experience of people and from their ability to change their own world.

Integrity

- 1.12 We need high standards in our organisation and must win confidence and trust of people by the quality and integrity of our representatives. Great care must be taken in selecting people to represent the party.

Change

- 1.13 Change is accepted by us as normal, necessary and nothing to be feared. Our party must develop the organisational flexibility to respond to a rapidly-changing world while maintaining our fundamental values. Hostility to progressive change is the hallmark of conservatism and has no place in a radical socialist party.

Progressive Alliances

- 1.14 Our strategy must adapt to many new forms of co-operation, short-term alliances for progress and the achievement of strategic goals, North and South. Such alliances have already emerged on the issue of peace in Northern Ireland, the struggle against poverty, the presidential election and the various referenda. There is tremendous potential for further alliances on the issues of women's rights, environmental and ecological protection, democratisation of education, the issue of low pay and minimum income and world peace. We should enter such alliances on a principled basis, recognising both their value and their limitations.

Public Representation

- 1.15 We must continue to expand our public representation but also develop more and more political initiatives outside of the parliamentary forum. There is no conflict between the two and they should never be counterposed. Our party is about a change in society and is not simply a parliamentary support

organisation. We see campaigning and the struggles of people as crucial elements in our development and, ultimately, the way in which the majority of people are politicised. Public representatives are the voice of the party and an integral part of it.

Economic Policies

- 1.16 The main function of the economic system must be the fulfilment of human and social needs. Our economic and social policies must be credible and relevant to people in this society. Our demands must be based on the need for the sustainable development of an efficient, modern economy, capable of surviving in a competitive world market. Social ownership and control of resources is fundamental to economic equality. We do not endorse capitalist property relations or the economic warfare that characterises free market capitalism, but we do recognise the need to develop our economic potential in the prevailing competitive international conditions.

The Wider Agenda

- 1.17 Our Party must incorporate in its agenda the most progressive demands of the women's movement, the environmental movement, civil liberties, the peace and social justice movements, the anti-poverty lobby and the many democratic people's organisation from the trade unions to the more localised community groups.

A People's Europe

- 1.18 Our party can play an increasingly important role in the debate on the development of a new, social Europe which hopefully can extend beyond the present European Community. In overcoming the traditional, nationalist analysis of politics, we are well placed to provide a more international perspective on this development. We recognise the limitations of the nation-state and the emergence of the large trans-national power-blocks. We see tremendous possibilities in the campaign for a 'People's Europe' which can bring together the citizens of so many countries in a fight for democracy, peace and economic and social justice.

FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

- 2.1 The Workers' Party as a democratic socialist party, is based on the belief that the interests of people rather than capital should be central to society.
- 2.2 Democracy and socialism are inseparable elements of our philosophy. We see democracy as the full and active participation of all citizens in decision-making and in exercising control over their own lives. For us socialism is the political, economic and social development of society to achieve the greatest possible degree of personal freedom, equality of citizenship and social solidarity within that democracy.
- 2.3 Our socialist ideology is one based on human liberation, for the individual as well as for our society. We believe in liberating each human being from all forms of exploitation, from class distinction, deprivation and want, from all the fear and insecurity which inequality creates. We seek to remove as many as possible of the economic and social obstacles which prevent people from achieving their full personal fulfilment in society.
- 2.4 We are committed to developing a society in which all citizens are full and equal partners, free from discrimination on the basis of class, creed, sex or racial origins. We wish to give equality of citizenship a new and expanded meaning in a truly democratic society.
- 2.5 We recognise women suffer under particular forms of discrimination, some of them open and obvious, others more hidden in attitudes and custom. Sexism and its patriarchal manifestations are oppressive, they impact unequally on men and women, and are exploitative of women and their elimination must be a central concern of our socialist programme.
- 2.6 Social solidarity for us is the co-operation of all men and women in an effort to transform society from one based on unrestrained competition and individual greed to one built on mutual respect and collective responsibility. We value the individuality of each human being but reject the philosophy of individualism which advances the rights of some individuals at the expense of society.
- 2.7 Our political analysis is derived from our understanding of the total human experience, of our own history and all the political, economic and social

realities of modern Ireland. We oppose all class and social divisions which create and maintain the exploitation of people as workers, as consumers, as taxpayers; which ruthlessly exploit our resources and destroy our environment; which deny so many citizens their full dignity as human beings; and which have in each decade denied many of our people, young and old, the right to live and work in their own country.

2.8 We particularly value the democratic political achievements of our own country, which have been won over many generations by the efforts of human struggle. These struggles have improved immeasurably the quality of life for most of our people, even within this unequal society. This has helped to create the conditions upon which we can build our future social progress.

2.9 We welcome the development of the political and social movements in this country and abroad, which challenge the many elite groups who retard the progressive advance of democracy. We particularly value the growing strength of many organisations which seek to expand the frontiers of our democracy and increase the active participation of people in the improvement and control of their own lives.

2.10 The Workers' Party wishes to work constructively with all these progressive organisations to achieve a truly democratic transformation of our society.

2.11 Further social progress requires also that we develop an efficient, modern wealth creating economy capable of providing sustainable employment for all and producing the highest quality goods and services in harmony with our natural environment. We recognise that equality and social justice can only be achieved if we tackle the many structural problems in our economy which inhibit the development of our full productive potential. We see industrial and economic democracy as essential elements in a true democracy and increasingly a vital necessity for any dynamic competitive modern economy.

2.12 We espouse the cause of peace everywhere and reject the various racial, sectarian and anti-democratic doctrines which lead inevitably to violence and war. The future of society requires that we struggle continuously to achieve justice and peace and eliminate the social evils which make wars unavoidable. We accept also the need to assist the legitimate struggles of

to people who are denied the democratic means to achieve progressive change or who have to resist naked oppression.

- 2.13 In this country we reject the politics of sectarian bigotry and support the right of all people to express their particular identity as free and equal citizens. We are committed to working for a sustainable unity between the people on this island on the basis of their common interests and not on the basis of domination by any particular sectarian group.
- 2.14 We believe in effective economic and social planning and the democratisation of all state institutions, the devolution of power and the involvement of people in controlling their own destiny. Social ownership and democratic control can be expressed in a variety of forms and is not synonymous with state ownership or bureaucratic, centralised control.
- 2.15 We support the development of our own state institutions and the European Community as vital democratic institutions for protecting the rights of citizens and ensuring that all our people share in the benefits of our economic progress. We aspire ultimately to an egalitarian, tolerant and pluralist society within which everyone is afforded the means and the opportunities to participate as an equal citizen, where freedom of religion is guaranteed and public decision making is not dictated by the precepts of any denomination.
- 2.16 In our view we are all interdependent and must work to achieve a new world order based on justice and peaceful co-existence.
- 2.17 We also reject the view that the best global economic or political order should be one of unrestrained competition for resources and markets. Such 'economic warfare' inevitably destroys communities, damages our environment, strengthens the strong at the expense of the weak and frequently creates the conditions for war.
- 2.18 Survival and liberation of the human race is dependent not only on peoples' relationships with each other, but also with their relationship with their environment. The future of life on this earth is threatened by the exploitation of the environment on a global level, which has given rise to an ecological crisis. The causes of this crises emphasise the interdependence of the human race and the solution to the crisis requires a collective international

approach. For the Workers' Party ecology is a central element of our ideology. We believe that ecological principles must be an integral part of economic and political decision making at all levels.

DEMOCRACY, CITIZENSHIP AND THE STATE

Democracy

- 3.1 Democracy is a fundamental principle for the Workers' Party. It is our view that democratic values must pervade all spheres of life and that representative democracy must combine with participative democracy if citizens are to exert control over the society in which they live.
- 3.2 Genuine democracy cannot flourish in a system based on various forms of exploitation. The central economic fact of advanced capitalism is private and ever more concentrated economic power. Political equality is not possible in those conditions. The democratic freedoms we cherish are hard won and even harder defended. They remain vulnerable in a society structured by a profoundly anti-democratic economic framework and an authoritarian social system. The alienation of many citizens from the democratic process in both the Republic and Northern Ireland is one consequence of this. Parliament is not the only seat of power and a democratic strategy cannot be confined to purely electoral politics.
- 3.3 The Workers' Party will pursue a vigorous programme of democratic reform aimed at developing a democratic, pluralist culture in this country. This will involve constitutional, legal, electoral and local government reform as well as the development of economic democracy. The European dimension and specifically the 'democratic deficit' must also be addressed.

Citizenship

- 3.4 Citizenship is about the involvement of people in the community in which they live. The Workers' Party seeks to base its politics on the expanded rights of citizens within our class-based society. The State must become an enabling institution which gives people the power and opportunity to pursue their own initiatives and assume their responsibilities as individuals firmly rooted in the community. The concept of civil society as distinct from the State must be strengthened.

The State

- 3.5 The State is not a neutral instrument, a simple tool of whichever political party happens to be in government. The State is sensitive, and responsive, to organised external forces, especially where these forces represent the

dominant interest groups in society. This is particularly the case where the State, as embodied in politicians and higher public servants, has internalised the ideologies and values of these groups.

- 3.6 The modern State is also a complex organism comprising various institutions and agencies whose influence pervades society. As bureaucratic organisations, the State and its constituent components have their own agendas, quite apart from those of outside forces. It is not simply a medium through which outside political and other social forces compete. It is a force in itself.

The Irish Republic

- 3.7 The Irish State has grown rapidly in the last 30 years and has consistently supported elites and subsidised privilege, blocking social mobility and reinforcing class divisions. It has fostered a culture of dependency which impoverishes the social, economic and cultural life of the country. Its policy on industry and agriculture has been irrational and wasteful and has marginalised small farmers and many urban workers while heavily subsidising large farmers and the private commercial/industrial sector. Health, educational and social welfare policies have reinforced inequality and given rise to an underclass subsisting at the margins on meagre state handouts.
- 3.8 It is our view that growth of the state apparatus itself will not solve our many social and economic problems, and in many instances will make them worse.
- 3.9 A transforming dynamic can be introduced into the State through the continuing growth and expansion of the Workers' Party and other progressive political forces. Reform of the State is necessary to promote choice, freedom, equality and an end to poverty. The State must work to eliminate inequality.
- 3.10 The Irish Constitution must be radically reformed so that it becomes person rather than property centred. Oireachtas procedures must be recast in ways to make them more responsive to the needs of a rapidly changing and modernising society. An electoral system preoccupied with local issues must give way to one which can give priority to issues of national importance. A

court system presently laden down with pomp, privilege and restrictions must be reformed so as to guarantee equality of access to the citizenry at large.

- 3.11 The bureaucracy must become more flexible and attuned to the needs of society through the creation of open government and the introduction of a Freedom of Information Act. There must be devolution of real powers and responsibilities to local authorities and communities by adherence to the principle of subsidiarity (i.e. that decisions be made and implemented by the lowest effective level possible). This will require the dismantling of the most centralised governmental system in Europe.

Northern Ireland

- 3.12 Central to the Workers' Party programme is the establishment of effective democratic political institutions and political accountability. In Northern Ireland we recognise and welcome the introduction of various forms of progressive legislation in voting, employment, housing and support for a secular and integrated system of education. However, we remain convinced that a Bill of Rights (now accepted by all democratic Northern Ireland parties) would provide both the political and psychological conditions for permanent progress. While our objective is the creation of democratic institutions with a number of the powers now exercised by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, we find totally unacceptable the way in which Northern Ireland business is dealt with at Westminster. Democratic accountability demands both an end to the system of legislation by Order in Council and the creation of a Northern Ireland Grand Committee.
- 3.13 The party will therefore continue to campaign for all forms of democratic progress, political, economic and social and against terrorism, sectarianism, discrimination and exploitation.

PRINCIPLES OF A SOCIALIST ECONOMIC POLICY

- 4.1 The main function of the economic system must be the fulfilment of human and social needs. To achieve this, we must develop an efficient, modern, wealth creating economy which can trade internationally in highly competitive conditions. Only such an economy can provide sustainable employment for the whole working population, as well as provide for the needs of those who are not in paid employment. The productive use and development of all available physical, capital and human resources is required in order to achieve our various social, political and cultural objectives, including equality between the sexes and high living standards, housing, health and care and educational opportunities for all.
- 4.2 The present economic system has failed to resolve the major structural economic and social problems of this country. Persistently high levels of unemployment, underemployment and emigration have characterised both states on this island since their foundation. The distribution of income and opportunity in each of them is among the most unequal in Europe. The problems of low pay, poverty, social deprivation and economic powerlessness are endemic in both. The inequitable conditions in which most goods and services are produced and distributed perpetuate inequality and constantly reproduce exploitation, waste and the threat of environmental destruction.
- 4.3 Our view is that social ownership, democratic planning and control of economic resources and activity is fundamental to justice in society. Social ownership and democratic control can be expressed in a variety of forms and is not synonymous with state ownership or bureaucratic, centralised control.
- 4.4 Traditionally, socialists have looked to state ownership and control of certain resources - control of the 'commanding heights of the economy' - as the most effective means of achieving economic and social equality. In some countries, this concept had developed into a highly centralised, command-style economy, through the suppression of the market mechanism and the introduction of politically-controlled state management structures, the collectivisation of agriculture and the abolition of all forms of autonomous economic organisation. That model has failed to achieve the objectives of

democratic socialism, which require the greatest possible level of democracy, efficiency, flexibility and dynamism in economic life. Fulfilment of these objectives also requires the maximum utilisation of individual and collective intelligence, the latest scientific knowledge and responsiveness to human needs.

4.5 We also hold the view that ownership, of itself (be it social or private) does not automatically empower those who formally hold it. Such empowerment may grow from ownership, but it does not always do so. Our objective is the real empowerment of the legitimate stakeholders in every enterprise.

4.6 The key to developing a dynamic, modern and socialist economy is the democratisation of all our economic relations. That requires a radical transformation of traditional company legislation and industrial relations structures which perpetuate all forms of economic inequality, privilege and hierarchical managerial systems. It means giving workers real power in the workplace, ensuring the availability of resources for progressive work organisations, reforming our penal taxation system and ending all vestiges of the master-servant relationship in the economy.

4.7 It also requires increased emphasis on education, the upgrading and acquisition of skills, asserting human control over new technologies, breaking down the barriers to development and increasing emphasis on the quality of working life and on the quality of the goods and services we produce. This must be done in harmony with our natural environment so that the employment created and the modes of production are sustainable in the years ahead.

4.8 Central to our strategy is the elimination of unemployment which is one of the greatest inefficiency factors in the economy of both states in Ireland. This is a political issue which requires the political commitment to use all the material and human resources available to us to develop a productive economy. Our economic strategy is based on the need to make a transition from welfare to wages and enable everyone to share in the dignity of participating in socially useful activity inside or outside the waged economy.

4.9 State ownership and development of resources is envisaged by us where this is in the broad social interest - where particular tasks can be carried out more effectively, efficiently or equitably than by other forms of ownership, or

where the latter will not perform them at all. In such cases we seek the greatest possible devolution of power through the involvement of all stakeholders - including workers, consumers and public representatives - in a democratic system of self-management. That will require the review, and where necessary reform, of existing state enterprises to ensure the maximum efficiency, accountability, social responsibility and 'user-friendliness'.

4.10 The development of joint ventures (both national and international) is also envisaged in strategic sectors of the economy. In such cases, the state may become a participant in the utilization of technology and expertise from other economic organisations.

4.11 We also see an enhanced role for genuine co-operative and community-based enterprise, worker-managed pension funds and individually or privately-owned enterprise which operates in accordance with the highest standards of social responsibility and public accountability.

4.12 The market is an important but imperfect mechanism for ascertaining consumer demands and preferences and allocating resources. Its function is not necessarily to allocate resources in accordance with social needs and priorities - and it may often positively impede this. Its operation therefore, must be democratically directed, controlled and, where necessary, curtailed. Mechanisms for performing this important function are still relatively under-developed and require careful nurturing.

4.13 The main ways in which we envisage democratisation of the market - or markets - occurring (and indeed, democratisation of economic activity generally) are through

- (i) redistribution of wealth and income,
- (ii) reorganisation and development of all forms of work,
- (iii) re-ordering of relationships between decision-makers and those who are presently outside the decision - making processes,
- (iv) development of more effective democratic decision-making bodies in the international arena such as the E.C. and United Nations,
- (v) improving the power and organisation of citizens as workers and consumers.

4.14 The development of worker participation and real empowerment in all economic sectors is fundamental to progress. This can take many different

forms and the key to success will be the ability of all concerned to recognise what particular forms of participation, and what structures for democratic decision-making, are most appropriate in each situation. In our view, the trade unions have a crucial role to play in pressing for new forms of worker involvement in economic managements, in improving the quality of working life and in representing the broader social interests of their members as consumers, taxpayers and citizens.

- 4.15 The development of all forms of economic democracy requires the fundamental reform of political power structures. There must also be a tackling of the problems of bureaucracy and inaccessibility through radical devolution of power and decentralisation of economic activity, as well as the full use of the latest communications technology. Parliament will continue to establish the broad economic and social parameters within which devolved economic activity can take place.
- 4.16 An important economic objective must be the removal of all remaining barriers to equality between the sexes, through reform and extension of the equality legislation, provision of community and workplace childcare facilities, reforms in social insurance and pensions provision, introduction of minimum wage legislation and a minimum income system, and full social and legal protection for part-time and other 'atypical' workers. It also requires the reorganisation and redistribution of both paid and unpaid work in society and the removal of all sex-stereotyping at home, at work and in the education system.
- 4.17 In order to provide for the full development of the personal potential of all individuals, as well as a reasonable living and working environment for everyone, a high priority must be given to both cultural and environmental development, in the allocation of resources and supports.

CLASS AND INEQUALITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

- 5.1 Many of the overt characteristics of class division have become blurred in Irish society in recent times. This has been due mainly to profound changes in the occupational structures, especially in the last thirty years. There has been an enormous growth in the number of non-manual workers, while the level of skill among manual workers has also increased greatly. Self-employment, part-time, temporary and contract working, and long-term unemployment have all become much more common. By contrast with other European countries, there are high levels of agricultural employment and low levels of female participation in the paid labour force. Home ownership (including tenant purchase) and migration have relocated many working class families and created new ghettos for the poor and unemployed. In spite of these apparent changes in the class structure, there is a persistence of rigid class division characterised by gross inequality, low pay, exploitation, social division, poverty, unemployment and emigration.
- 5.2 The term class is often misunderstood. For example government statistical publications normally refer to manual workers as "working class", and non-manual workers as "middle class". However, the fact remains that most non-manual workers are employees who work for somebody else, and who have little direct control over their workplaces. The Workers' Party considers as working class all those who are employed by others - i.e. waged and salaried employees - as well as those earning a living from self-employment, the self-employed and those engaged in unpaid labour. These are distinguished from employers and the wealthy self-employed who, because of their control over the country's economic resources, constitute the ruling class.
- 5.3 The occupational structure of society in the Republic of Ireland has undergone profound change since independence, and particularly over the last thirty years. There has been a massive decline in the numbers working in agriculture. While the numbers of manual non-agricultural workers has not changed much, the level of skill in the manual workforce has greatly increased (due mainly to the growth of modern manufacturing industry). The number of non-manual workers has more than doubled since independence,

with most of the growth taking place among salaried employees (mainly teachers, health workers, public servants and other office workers).

- 5.4 Outside agriculture, only just over four per cent of the labour force are employers. A similar proportion are successfully self-employed. These are the groups which control the bulk of the country's wealth (apart from big farmers and foreign firms). There is also a small and highly-paid managerial elite which exerts a major influence over the use of the country's resources, but whose ability to accumulate wealth is constrained by a tax system which favours property-owners over salaried employees.
- 5.5 Irish society, therefore, is very unequal in terms of the distribution of income, wealth, and consequently, power. Furthermore, this inequality is embedded in the class structure of society and reinforced by a state apparatus which is mainly responsive to the interests of the dominant classes. As a result, access to higher incomes and better life opportunities is heavily restricted to the members of already privileged groups. People from disadvantaged backgrounds have greatly reduced opportunities of personal achievement.
- 5.6 Gender inequality exists in women's unequal access to paid employment, to economic resources and to the political and economic institutions of our society, in the distribution of work in the home, in the limitations placed on their personal autonomy, and in social subordination; it is underpinned by sexism which limits women's freedom of choice and enables them to be exploited.
- 5.7 Not only are the class and gender inequalities outlined above unfair, but the development of the community at large is held back due to the resultant suppression of the abilities of a large proportion of its members.
- 5.8 In the Republic of Ireland, the top one third of income recipients account for 60% of all disposable income, whereas the bottom one third have a share of just over 10%. The top one third represent employers, the wealthy self-employed, salaried managers and professional workers; whereas the bottom one third are drawn from the unemployed, small farmers, and unskilled manual workers.
- 5.9 Wealth is even more unevenly divided, with a mere five per cent of the population owning up to two thirds of all wealth. The concentration of wealth

in the hands of a small group of employers and self-employed is facilitated by a state distribution system which delivers large amounts of economic assistance (grants, subsidies) to the owners of property, while subjecting the same property owners to low levels of personal taxation.

5.10 Thus, large proprietors pay income tax at a lower rate than most groups in the PAYE sector (including salaried employees) and very little by way of wealth or property tax. Tax on property accounted for 17% of total tax revenue in 1965 and only 4% in 1984. Company tax as a proportion of the total fell from 9% to 3% in the same period. In Britain, these taxes account for one quarter of the total. As a result, a disproportionate amount of tax is paid by the PAYE sector.

5.11 While taxation has grown considerably in Ireland over the last thirty years and is high by European standards, it has had little effect in terms of reducing income disparities which, in fact, have been widening in recent years. This is partly because most of the tax burden falls on middle income groups, while much of the resultant revenue goes to higher income groups in the form of economic assistance (which in total is equivalent to three quarters of the amount spent by the state on social assistance).

5.12 While there has been a concentration of wealth at one end of the class spectrum, there has been a concentration of poverty at the other end. One third of the Irish population have been classified as being poor by the Combat Poverty Agency. These include not only the unemployed, but over half of the farming population, and large numbers of those in employment, especially part-time workers (mainly women) and those in dead-end service jobs. There has been a significant growth in recent years in the number of those in what were previously considered to be secure "middle class" occupations who have fallen below the poverty line due to loss of employment.

5.13 While the number of better-quality jobs has expanded enormously over the last three decades, access to these jobs has been largely restricted to members of the already well-off. The chances of upward social mobility in Ireland are considerably less than in most other European countries. This is mainly due to the extremely unequal distribution of educational opportunity here.

-
- 5.14 Student from semi and unskilled backgrounds, boys and girls, are much more likely to leave school earlier than better off students and much less likely to participate in higher education.
- 5.15 State spending on education makes little provision for positive discrimination in favour of schools which cater mainly for lower-income working class children, while the schools of the privileged can draw on considerable extra funding from parents, thereby further sharpening their level of advantage. Underrepresentation of students from working class backgrounds in the very expensive and mainly state-funded university sector simply reinforces the extent to which state expenditure favours the well-to-do.
-
- 5.16 However, the problem of educational disadvantage cannot be solved simply by providing additional funding for disadvantaged students. Students whose parents are unemployed or in poorly paid jobs tend to be constrained by poor levels of motivation in school. Hence, ultimately, any programme to tackle fundamentally the problem of inequality of opportunity in Ireland must tackle the underlying problems of high unemployment, low skill and low pay.
- 5.17 It must also tackle gender inequalities. Women are concentrated in low skilled, low paid and unpaid employment. Women are still very poorly represented in technological education at both secondary and third level and therefore have little access to much of the best paid employment on offer.
- 5.18 No Irish government has ever seriously addressed the question of providing adequate employment opportunities for the country's population. Down through the years, the main priority of government policy has been to protect and develop the interests of established elite groups. Where it has occurred, employment expansion has been an incidental offshoot, instead of being the primary objective of government policy.
- 5.19 An entrenched system of social inequality constitutes a fundamental obstacle to building a truly democratic society in Ireland. Effective democracy requires active participation on the part of all citizens. This will not be possible so long as the privilege of the few is based on the alienation of the many. A profound restructuring of Irish society is therefore required in order to confer on all citizens the opportunity to develop their own personal capabilities. While this may have the short term effect of upsetting the

privileged position of a minority, in the long term everyone will benefit from the fuller development of individual talents.

- 5.20 It is necessary, therefore, to secure a broad social consensus in favour of both economic policies capable of securing effective full employment and social policies devoted to equality of educational and career opportunity. Entrenched inequalities deriving from the existing concentration of ownership of wealth and property must also be tackled through policies whereby forms of social ownership of national resources can be expanded. Mechanisms for achieving the latter are outlined in the section of this document dealing with economic policy.

CLASS, SECTARIANISM AND INEQUALITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

- 6.1 The last forty years have seen the collapse of both Northern Ireland's traditional industrial base and of the newer industries which were brought in to replace that base. By the end of the 1980s there were more people unemployed in the North than were employed in manufacturing. However, even in its most prosperous period, Northern Ireland remained the poorest region in the U.K.
- 6.2 There can be no denying the brutal realities of economic and social deprivation in Northern Ireland. In the last few years official figures of unemployment (an underestimate of the real extent of the problems) have ranged from 16-20% of the regional figures and mask much higher figures in particular areas like Newry, Strabane and West Belfast. When economic expansion has occurred in the rest of the UK it has tended to widen the gap with Northern Ireland rather than promote growth in the province.
- 6.3 Gross earnings averaged £215 per week for full time male employees in April 1988, lower than any other region in the UK. GDP per person has consistently been less than 80% of that in the UK over the last decade. Fewer households in Northern Ireland have a washing machine, freezer or telephone compared to the rest of the UK. More people rely on social security, and despite significant improvement in the 1980s, the quality of housing is poorer than in other parts of the UK.
- 6.4 The capacity of working class people to struggle against such conditions have been undermined by the structural sectarian divisions which cut across class cleavages. Historically the basis for the state lay in a communal alliance between the Protestant landlord and business classes with the Protestant working class in the towns and tenant farmers and farm labourers in the countryside. This mobilisation was in part based on the exclusion of Catholic labour from particular industries and occupations.
- 6.5 It was these practices which created the basis for the situation today where Catholics are more than 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed than Protestants. This reality has encouraged the view that the key question is that of Catholic disadvantage. In fact, as long as the question is dealt with in

this way the main result will be a continuation of an existing trend for the development of a new Catholic professional middle class while the conditions of larger sections of the Catholic and Protestant working class continue to deteriorate.

- 6.6 Historically the fundamental mistake of Labourism in Northern Ireland was to talk about class and ignore the issues of sectarian discrimination. Nowadays as the core elements of traditional class politics, the Protestant industrial bourgeoisie and industrial working class, shrink to vanishing point, a new form of mystification emerges which detaches sectarianism from class. Its manifestations include many of the programmes based on "Community Relations" and "Cultural Traditions".
- 6.7 A strategy for fair employment which raises no questions about the existing economic structures in Northern Ireland will largely benefit the Catholic middle class. Similarly, in a situation where the education system is also totally geared to producing the best A Level results in the UK and the largest proportion of teenagers who leave school with no educational qualification at all, anti-sectarian initiatives will founder on the cynicism and rancour of those condemned to a future of cosmetic "training" schemes, low paid casual work and unemployment.
- 6.8 Often the most virulent forms of sectarianism are manifested by those sections of the working class which are most deprived, and most powerless both economically and politically. Only a political strategy which deals with the material conditions of these groups can hope to challenge sectarianism.
- 6.9 Sectarianism is a complex issue and has clearly more than an economic dimension. The Churches with their commitment to a largely segregated educational system at the primary and secondary level, cannot escape a responsibility for reproducing the crucial ideologies of difference. At the same time the Workers' Party in its commitment to a unified and secular educational system, is not suggesting that such reforms, important as they would be, would solve the problem.
- 6.10 Sectarianism has deep historical roots which predate industrial capitalism and its class system. However, its reproduction in the present is linked to the existence of economic and social inequalities which the simple working of market forces and current fair employment policies have not effectively

challenged. At the core of an effective anti-sectarian strategy will be a radical transformation of economic policy.

- 6.11 The extension of the British welfare state and the Butler Education Act to Northern Ireland after the Second World War made Northern Ireland despite its backwardness in UK terms, in a number of ways a considerably more egalitarian society than that of the Republic. For example, in the last three decades it has been much easier for someone of working class origin to get to university in the North than the Republic. Nevertheless, the rapid decline of the productive economy in the province has led not simply to a continuing high level of unemployment but to a large sector of low paid and often part-time employment in the services sector. The hopes of the founders of the welfare state for a decent level of economic and social citizenship for all, have, in Northern Ireland, been fatally undermined by a combination of economic decline, the deterrent effect of two decades of violence and over a decade of Thatcherite economic policies in Britain.

GLOBAL POLITICS

- 7.1 There is now a greater awareness than ever before of the interdependence of people everywhere on each other; an interdependence which is economic, political and ecological. That awareness coupled with the far-reaching and global impact of Glasnost and Perestroika in the Soviet Union; the unity of Germany and the end of the cold war has literally changed the political map of Europe. When the cold war ended people all over the world breathed a sigh of relief because they felt the threat of a nuclear holocaust had been lifted, and a search began for a new basis for international relationships. Everyone was talking optimistically about a new world order! But events since then have shown that goodwill and optimism alone will not create a just order.
- 7.2 Ideological Conflict Continues: It is now clear that the end of the 'cold war' should not be mistaken as an end to the conflict of ideas, or be assumed to mean that powerful forces would no longer seek to dominate the world for their own selfish interests.
- 7.3 The Gulf war launched by the US and its allies, in response to the annexation of Kuwait by Iraq, was a clear grab for superiority in that region and for control of its oil wealth.
- 7.4 That war has clarified for many people that the new world order sought by the US and its allies including Ireland is intended to maintain the old economic order of exploitation. The privileges of wealth everywhere, and the advantages of the developed world, will be maintained at any costs.
- 7.5 In addressing global politics and deciding on our attitude to events, states and parties we are therefore conscious that the so-called 'Invisible Hand' of capitalism is cruel, and blind to the needs of human beings. Capital is merciless in its drive to exploit the people and the resources of the world, with its abuse of the discoveries of science, robbing the people of the third world of the right to life itself, and pushing the world towards extinction.
- 7.6 Collective Security: As Socialists our concerns in this area have to be: to support and campaign for a global collective security system based on a reformed and democratised U.N.; Nuclear Disarmament and the banning of chemical and biological weapons; a new world economic order based on

sustainable development, the slowing of scientific and technological knowledge; ecological protection; and respect of cultural diversity.

7.7 Irish Neutrality: Our objectives clearly imply an active role for Ireland in International Affairs and not one of isolationism or passive alignment with the most powerful or the most profitable alliances. We stand therefore for positive neutrality as a policy position which would enable us to take an active role in international fora such as the U.N., C.S.C.E. and E.P.C. on the side of peaceful negotiated settlement of international crises and against war.

7.8 For our influence to be effective we must insist that the balance of power in such fora are weighted in favour of the dispossessed of the world to replace the new redundant 'cold war' balance of interests. This requires radical changes in how the U.N. Security Council reaches its decisions, and monitors actions carried out in its name; it means that the General Assembly of the U.N. must have a more clearly defined and effective role in Security Council decisions, and also expansion of the Security Council membership. The C.S.C.E. should also be developed as a pan European forum for collective security under the U.N.

European Policy

7.9 The Workers' Party favours, in principle, the moves towards European Union and believes that it offers an opportunity to overcome both the inherent limitations of the nation state and its inability to deal with powerful global institutions which have evolved.

7.10 The party is committed to participating fully in the continuing debate on European Union. There will be a more unified Europe in the short-term and its level of democracy will be determined by the extent to which its institutions are amenable to democratic control.

7.11 Proposals that such a Union should have a security and defence dimension would only be acceptable as a means to defend members states against aggression and could not be countenanced as a step towards a European Superpower helping to police the world or to militarily protect its interests internationally. Security and defence would have to be non-nuclear, and opposed to war, and aimed primarily at confidence building between states. It should be under the umbrella of the C.S.C.E. and seek the dissolution of

-
- antagonistic military blocs. Within the E.C. decision making on security and defence issues would have to be by unanimity.
- 7.12 The European Parliament, as the democratically elected body representing the citizens of the EC, must be given an adequate role in Community decision making, particularly in relation to the unelected institutions. This must be accompanied by the development of closer links between the EP and the national parliaments and the devolution of power to the maximum extent possible to empower the citizen in the local community.
- 7.13 The recent changes which have taken place in the world order offer the Left in Europe an opportunity to make democracy the issue and to put forward proposals for structures at local, regional, national and European level which are accessible, effective, and responsive to the need of its citizens.
- 7.14 The development of a more truly democratic Europe must also involve a greater opportunity for input by representative organisations and non-governmental organisations and prioritise the development of a social Europe and the concepts of a civil society.

- 7.15 The Workers' Party favours the development of broad co-operation among the parties on the European Left, and commits itself to furthering such development.

Third World

- 7.16 The human and material resources of the developing countries continue to be exploited by the developed world, in particular the 'Group of Seven' leading industrial countries.
- 7.17 Developing countries now have overt political sovereignty, but their efforts to achieve fuller development are frustrated by a web of interlocking economic power structures, which enable the 'First World' to perpetuate its control over terms of trade, the flow of capital, commodity prices, exchange rates, communications networks and technology.
- 7.18 Ireland must play its role in fulfilling obligations towards the estimated 3,000 million destitute people on the planet.

This involves:

-
- (i) a substantial increase in this country's bilateral aid programme, slashed by 50% in the past three years, to achieve the UN target of Official Development Assistance within a five year period.
- (ii) the adoption of development strategies which not only promote sustained economic growth in the third world, but also distributional equity, social integration, pluralism and care for the environment.

International Party Relations

7.19 The first principle is that relations are decided by the Ard Comhairle on advice from the Party's International Affairs Committee. The Ard Comhairle decides on establishing, breaking or suspending relations.

7.20 These should be seen on three levels and should be inclusive rather than exclusive.

- (1) Diplomatic
- (2) Party to Party
- (3) Trade

7.21 Diplomatic: Would cover virtually all states, particularly those with ambassadors accredited to Ireland unless specifically decided by the Ard Comhairle. Reasons for not having relations could be based on criterion such as human rights abuses; suppression of democracy; international terrorism; aggression against another state. The guidelines of U.N., C.S.C.E. or other fora could be adopted as basis.

7.22 Party to Party: As an independent socialist party we have traditionally sought friendly relations with a range of parties including the Socialist International excluding only fascist, terrorist and ultra-left groups. This practice should continue but with a more formal and carefully respected procedure to ensure that there is no misunderstanding publicly or within the party on the nature of the relationships. A party bulletin on international affairs should be published at least annually outlining our position on various issues.

7.23 Trade: In the course of diplomatic and Party to Party contacts opportunities for developing trade between Ireland and other countries often arise. It is in the interest of working people everywhere that such trade should be encouraged where it is beneficial to each country. Trade of course would not be encouraged by us with parties or states where the people there are

struggling against oppression e.g. South Africa. Again, however, decisions should be made by the Ard Comhairle based on consultation with the International Affairs Committee and in line with the expressed needs and wishes of progressive parties in those countries.

Constitution

1 General

1.1 The name of the Party is The Workers' Party.

1.2 The Workers' Party is a democratic, socialist party.

2 Objectives

2.1 The objectives of the Workers' Party are:

- (a) the development of a democratic, socialist Republic in Ireland and to contribute to the development of democratic socialism in Europe. We are committed to working for a sustainable unity between the people on this island on the basis of their common interests and not on the basis of domination by any sectarian group,
- (b) an egalitarian, tolerant, pluralist society within which everyone is afforded the means and the opportunity to participate as an equal citizen,
- (c) the elimination of all forms of exploitation, whether based on gender, race or religion,
- (d) the incorporation of ecological principles into economic and political decision-making,
- (e) Social ownership and control of resources as fundamental to the achievement of economic equality,
- (f) a positive neutrality, opposition to war and to military blocs and the development of global collective security.

3 Means

3.1 The Workers' Party pursues its objectives by democratic political activity, in order to win democratic majorities in both states in Ireland.

3.2 Our Strategy involves co-operation with a wide range of democratic organisations in our society, participating in alliances on a principled basis.

-
- 3.3 Our means include a vigorous programme of democratic reform, involving constitutional, legal, electoral and local government reform, as well as the development of economic democracy. We seek the development of effective democratic political institutions in Northern Ireland.

4 Principles of Organisation

- 4.1 Democracy is central to the organisation of the Workers' Party. In a dynamic organisation there will be differences of opinion on policies or tactics. The party will be the richer for that diversity. The integrity of the decision-making process is protected by ensuring that decisions are made democratically and that there is collective responsibility for implementing those decisions. The leadership of the party is elected democratically and is accountable to the membership.

- 4.2 Open and free debate is encouraged and as much use as possible made of consensus decision-making. Where necessary, decisions are made by majority vote.

5 Constitutional Amendments

- 5.1 Any part of this Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds majority vote of delegates at the party Ard Fheis. Party rules and regulations may be amended by a simple majority.